

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 4 DUBLIN 0030

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, EGEN, EI, UK, US

SUBJECT: IRELAND AT YEAR'S END

1. SUMMARY: THE SIX-MONTH-OLD LYNCH GOVERNMENT, RETURNED TO POWER WITH THE LARGEST MANDATE IN IRISH HISTORY, HAS BEEN MOVING SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY. IT HAS ACHIEVED A GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION -- PRINCIPALLY STRENGTHENING THE PLANNING ROLE -- AND ANNOUNCING VARIOUS PROGRAMS TO STIMULATE DEMAND AND PROMOTE JOB CREATION. ECONOMICS, AND A RASH OF WILDCAT STRIKES, GET ALL THE PUBLIC ATTENTION. THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS SLIGHTLY IMPROVED. GROWTH IS UP, INVESTMENT IS DOING WELL, AND THE INFLATION RATE IS SLOWING. HOWEVER, THE NUMBER ONE PROBLEM, UNEMPLOYMENT, REMAINS INTRACTABLE. IRELAND'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFICULTIES -- HIGH FERTILITY AND REDUCTION OF EMIGRATION TO A TRICKLE -- HAVE FUELED THIS PROBLEM, AND A GROWING POOL OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTH IS CAUSING CONCERN. ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THOUGH WE DETECT A SLIGHT TENDENCY TO PREFER A MORE CONSERVATIVE APPROACH IN THE EC AND A CLOSER ATTENTION TO PROTECTING IRELAND'S PERCEIVED NATIONAL

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INTERESTS. PRIME MINISTER LYNCH IS ALLOWING SOME OF HIS MINISTERS A RATHER FREE HAND IN TAKING A STRONG STAND FOR IRISH INTERESTS IN THE EC, FISHERIES BEING THE MOST NOTABLE EXAMPLE. HOWEVER, TO DATE THERE HAVE BEEN NO CRUNCH ISSUES IN THE EC AFFECTING IRISH INTERESTS WHICH WOULD REQUIRE MAJOR GOI DECISIONS. A DISCUSSION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND

PROBLEM AS SEEN FROM DUBLIN FOLLOWS SEPTTEL.
END SUMMARY

2. THE NEW GOVERNMENT STARTS SLOWLY.

THE LYNCH GOVERNMENT TOOK POWER IN JULY AND PROMPTLY RECESSED THE PARLIAMENT (DAIL) FOR A LONG HIATUS WHILE THE NEW MINISTERS GOT A GRIP ON THEIR JOBS. (MOST OF THEM HAVE BEEN MINISTERS IN PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS). RECONVENING THE DAIL ON OCTOBER 12, LYNCH HAD NOT MOVED DRAMATICALLY FAST, AND HAS KEPT A REMARKABLY LOW PROFILE. VERY LITTLE LEGISLATION HAS BEEN MOVED. THE MAIN ORDER OF BUSINESS WAS A GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION. LYNCH REALIGNED MINISTRIES AND CREATED A SECOND STRING OF JUNIOR MINISTERS ON THE BRITISH MODEL, A NEEDED IMPROVEMENT TO COPE WITH FREQUENT MINISTERIALS IN BRUSSELS. THE MOST IMPORTANT ADDITION WAS THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, HEADED BY PROFESSOR MARTIN O'DONOGHUE. THE EBULLIENT PROFESSOR IS EVERYWHERE AND SEEMINGLY DOING EVERYTHING SO FAR, AND IS DEFINITELY THE VOICE OF THE GOVERNMENT. ESTABLISHED STARS SUCH AS GEORGE COLLEY, FINANCE MINISTER, HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET. OF THE OLD POLS ONLY CHARLEY HAUGHEY HAS STAKED OUT A PUBLIC PRESENCE, BUT IN HIS RELATIVELY MINOR PORTFOLIO OF HEALTH AND WELFARE HE IS NOT IN THE MAINSTREAM OF THIS GOVERNMENT'S DECISION-MAKING.
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3. LYNCH IN POWER.

THERE WAS A LACKADAISICAL START AFTER THE MOST SMASHING ELECTORAL VICTORY IN IRELAND'S 55-YEAR HISTORY, WHICH

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SEEMINGLY GAVE A MANDATE TO ACHIEVE DRAMATIC CHANGE. BUT IN FACT THE FIANNA FAIL DID NOT PROMISE MUCH BASIC CHANGE. THE ELECTORAL PROMISES WERE: LOWER TAXES, MORE JOBS, LOWERED RATE OF INFLATION, A RENEWED ECONOMIC TAKEOFF AND JACK LYNCH, THE PROTO-FATHER-FIGURE. WE ARE WONDERING WHETHER JACK LYNCH, FEELS THAT HE SHOULD NOW SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE SOME KIND OF MARK ON IRISH HISTORY. AT AGE SIXTY HE HAS A FEW GOOD YEARS OF POWER LEFT, AND IS NOW AT THE APOGEE, BUT THIS IS PROBABLY HIS LAST AND BEST CHANCE. THERE ARE NO LEFT-WING OR RIGHT-WING IDEOLOGIES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN FIANNA FAIL, AD NO INDIVIDUALS EVEN DISTANTLY REVALING FOR POWER. LYNCH, HOWEVER, IS NOT A DYNAMIC OR CHARISMATIC INDIVIDUAL. HE HAS A RATHER PASSIVE, REFLECTIVE, CAREFUL CHARACTER. HIS LEADERSHIP HAS, HOWEVER, GROWN IN ASSURANCE. ON THE EUROPEAN SCENE LYNCH HAE NEVER BEEN ASSERTIVE OR VERY EFFECTIVE, BUT WE NOTE A COMFORTABLE AIR OF CONFIDENCE IN HIS INITIAL EUROPEAN MEETINGS. HE IS QUITE AWARE THAT NOTWITHSTANDING HIS COUNTRY'S SMALL SIZE, HE IS AN ELDER STATESMAN OF THE EC, AND SPEAKS FROM A UNIQUELY POWERFUL PERSONAL AND ELECTORAL SITUATION.

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4. STRIKE FEVER.

REFLECTING THE PARLIAMENTARY TORPOR, THERE HAVE BEEN FEW POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC HEADLINES IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS. A WAVE OF WILDCAT STRIKES HAS DRAWN THE MOST ATTENTION. ONE INTERJURISDICTIONAL STRIKE AT A DUTCH-OWNED PLANT WAS THE FINAL TRAW WHICH FORCED THE CLOSURE OF THE PLANT IN NOVEMBER, PUTTING 1500 ADDITIONAL PEOPLE ON THE UNEMPLOYMENT ROLLS. OTHER BIG FIRMS SUCH AS TARA MINES AND THE LARGE JAPANESE ASAHI CHEMICAL FIBER PLANT HAVE ALSO BEEN HARD HIT BY UNOFFICIAL STRIKES. ALTHOUGH RECENT STATISTICS SHOW IRELAND STILL WELL BELOW THE UK IN LOST MAN-HOURS, STRIKE FEVER HAS INCREASED OF LATE. IT IS NOT EASILY ATTRIBUTABLE TO ANY ONE FACTOR. IT IS NOT ENTIRELY ABOUT WAGES -- THE CLICHE "STRUCTURAL" IS

USED, I.E., DIFFERENTIALS, INTER-UNION DISPUTES, LATE-BLOOMING AUTOMATION PROBLEMS -- AND A RATHER GENERAL MALAISE IN A HASTILY-INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRY WHICH HAS NOT YET SORTED OUT A WORKABLE LABOR-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM. IT IS USEFUL TO REMEMBER THAT ONLY 25 YEARS AGO THIS COUNTRY COULD HAVE MET MOST OF THE TESTS TO QUALIFY AS AN LDC, EXCEPT IN EDUCATION AND LITERARY/SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION. INDUSTRIALIZATION HAS COME VERY FAST.

5. SLIGHT UPTURN IN THE ECONOMY.

IN TERMS OF GROWTH IRELAND HAD A RELATIVELY GOOD YEAR WITH A FIVE PERCENT RISE IN REAL GNP (THE BEST IN THE EC) AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE TALKING ABOUT SEVEN PERCENT FOR 1978. NEXT YEAR PROMISES ABOUT THE SAME IN GROWTH. BUT UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS ABOVE NINE PERCENT, STILL THE HIGHEST IN THE EC. INFLATION HAS

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ABATED MORE RAPIDLY THAN EXPECTED, BUT REMAINS HIGH -- AND ESTIMATED 13 PERCENT THIS YEAR. INDUSTRIAL GROWTH IS FUELED BY FOREIGN INVESTMENT, MUCH OF IT FROM THE U.S., COMING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHEAP LABOR (BY EC STANDARDS) AND PRODUCT ENTRY INTO THE COMMON MARKET AND VARIOUS INCENTIVES OFFERED BY THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THE NEW INVESTMENT IS NOT HELPING THE EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE MUCH SINCE THE NEWER INDUSTRIES ARE NOT LABOR INTENSIVE: ELECTRONICS, CHEMICALS, PHARMACEUTICALS, AND LIGHT MACHINERY. ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT SUBSTANTIALLY, DESPITE ITS BEST EFFORTS. TOO MUCH DEPENDS ON EXTERNAL FACTORS. ON BALANCE, THERE ARE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES, BUT THINGS SEEM TO BE STABILIZING AND EVEN LOOKING UP SLIGHTLY IN THE IRISH ECONOMY.

6. NATIONAL WAGE AGREEMENT.

THE MOST IMPORTANT ECONOMIC EVENT IN THE OFFING IS THE COMMENCEMENT OF NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NATIONAL WAGE AGREEMENT. THE GOVERNMENT INSISTS STRONGLY ON A MAXIMUM FIVE PERCENT INCREASE (WITH TAX CUTS TO

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PROVIDE A RISE IN REAL INCOMES). IT HAS HINTED THAT
A BREACH OF THE FIVE PERCENT COULD BRING QUICK
LEGISLATION TO MAKE IT MANDATORY. ALTHOUGH THIS HAS
BEEN TRIED BEFORE IN IRELAND WITH DICEY R ILTAIT NOTMENTARY VOTES BUT
ALSO PROBABLY
SUFFICIENT PUBLIC BACKING TO MAKE IT STICK.
FINTAN KENNEDY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE LARGEST UNION
(I.T.G.W.U.), TOLD US HE BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT IS
SERIOUS AND HE IS INCLINED TO THINK LABOR WILL GO
ALONG WITH THE FIVE PERCENT, OR SOMETHING CLOSE TO IT.
AFTER INITIAL SKIRMISHES IN THE NOW STANDARD TRIPARTITE
NEGOTIATIONS, THERE HAS BEEN A HOLIDAY BREAK AND
NEGOTIATIONS WILL RESUME IN JANUARY. THE UNIONS CAN BE
EXPECTED TO STALL A SETTLEMENT UNTIL AFTER THE FEBRUARY
FIRST BUDGET PRESENTATION. GOVERNMENT AND LABOR WILL
PROBABLY GET INTO AN "AFTER YOU, ALPHONSE" ROUTINE
SIMILAR TO LAST YEAR. THUS WE DO NOT EXPECT A SETTLE-
MENT UNTIL LATE FEBRUARY OR EVEN MARCH OR APRIL.
PRESENT INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL GET
ABOUT WHAT IT WANTS DESPITE MUCH GRUMBLING AND SOME
WILECAT STRIKES BY THE RANK AND FILE.

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7. DEMOGRAPHY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND PRESSURE.

DEMOGRAPHY HAS SUDDENLY BEEN RECOGNIZED AS A MAJOR
PROBLEM. IRELAND HAS IN THE PAST EXPORTED ITS SURPLUS
POPULATION, WHILE ADHERING TO A UNIQUE (FOR EUROPE)
FERTILE FAMILY PRODUCTION WITHOUT EVEN A NOD TO
CONTRACEPTION. THE SALE OF CONTRACEPTIVES IS STILL

ILLEGAL. WITH THE RECESSION IN THE UK, AND EASY EMIGRATION TO THE U.S., AUSTRALIA, AND CANADA CLOSED OFF, THERE IS NO LONGER A SAFETY VALVE. THE BEST FIGURES INDICATE THAT THE POPULATION IS GROWING AT A RATE OF ABOUT 1.6 PERCENT PER ANNUM, AND THE RATE IS INCREASING. THE THINKERS IN THE LYNCH ADMINISTRATION ARE QUITE AWARE OF THIS PROBLEM, WHICH IS MOVING UP FAST IN PUBLIC AWARENESS. THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE WORK FORCE IS ALSO DECREASING RAPIDLY. GREAT NUMBERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENTERING THE LABOR MARKET -- AND THE JOBS ARE NOT THERE. THUS FAR, TRADITIONAL RESTRAINTS IN A HOMOGENOUS, CLOSE-KNIT, CHURCH-DOMINATED SOCIETY HAVE CONTAINED THIS PRESSURE. BUT A STEADY RISE IN UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS IS LIKELY TO PRODUCE SOCIAL UNREST FAIRLY SOON. THE FIANNA FAIL GOVERNMENT IS BEGINNING TO WORRY. UNEMPLOYMENT IS THE MAIN SYMPTOM OF THIS BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEM. SOLUTIONS ARE NOT EASY TO DISCERN, AND NONE OF THOSE BEING SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED IS RADICAL. THE FRAGILE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THIS LITTLE COUNTRY DEPENDS UPON THE FREE MARKET SYSTEM AND BEING COMPETITIVE IN THE EC. WE DETECT NO INCLINATION IN FIANNA FAIL TO OPT FOR SUCH THINGS AS WIDESPREAD NATIONALIZATION. O'DONOGHUE'S PLAN RELIES CHIEFLY ON INCREASED GOVERNMENT DEFICIT SPENDING. THE LABOR MINISTRY HAS THE TASK OF PREPARING LEGISLATION TO FORBID OVERTIME WORK, THUS SHARING THE AVAILABLE

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JOBS TO A LARGER NUMBER OF WORKERS. BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH LEGISLATION WILL BE PASSED UNLESS SIMILAR LEGISLATION IS EFFECTED THROUGHOUT THE EC. OTHERWISE, IRISH INDUSTRY'S COMPETITIVE POSITION WOULD BE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED. AN EC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN DECEMBER HAS BEEN DISCUSSING THIS AND OTHER POSSIBLE EC-WIDE MOVES TO ALLEVIATE UNEMPLOYMENT.

8. THE NW TEAM.

THE NEW TEAM, ACTUALLY AN EXPERIENCED TEAM FROM THE INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE MINISTER O'MALLEY HAS BEEN TO THE U.S. THREE TIMES, AN INDICATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF U.S. INVESTMENT. FOREIGN MINISTER O'KENNEDY HAS ALSO BEEN TO THE U.S., AND TO GREECE, NOT TO MENTION VISITS TO SEVERAL EC CAPITALS. MOST OF THE TRAVELING, HOWEVER, BY MOST OF THE MINISTERS HAS BEEN TO BRUSSELS AS THE NEW TEAM ATTEMPTS TO COPE WITH THE EC. FISHERIES MINISTER LENIHAN HAS GOTTEN MOST OF THE PUBLICITY AS HE LASHES OUT AT THE DUTCH AND OTHERS, TRYING SOMEHOW TO PRESERVE IRISH COASTAL FISH STOCKS FROM ANNIHILATION AND RESERVE THIS RESOURCE FOR IRISH

FISHERMEN. HE HAS HAD LITTLE SUCCESS, BUT IS GETTING

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FULL MARKS FOR EFFORT. SO FAR, IN GENERAL EC AFFAIRS, THE IRIST HAVE BEEN PASSIVE. THERE HAVE NOT BEEN ANY CRUNCH ISSUES SINCE FIANNA FAIL CAME INTO OFFICE IN JUNE. THE EC BUDGET, WHICH IS SLIGHTLY FAVORABLE TO IRELAND, WAS SEEMINGLY PASSED WITHOUT MUCH EFFORT ON THE PART OF THE GOI. THE IRISH ARE CASTING AN INCREASINGLY COLD EYE ON THE GREECE/PORTUGAL/SPAIN ENTRY AS THEY BEGIN TO REALIZE THE ECONOMIC DIS-ADVANTAGE TO IRELAND, BUT ARE PUBLICLY SUPPORTING ACCESSION.

9. FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM CONTINUES AS A MAJOR PREOCCUPATION, THOUGH IN THIS AREA LYNCH IS ALSO MOVING CAUTIOUSLY. WE ARE SENDING A SEPTEL ON THIS SUBJECT. ON OTHER FOREIGN AFFAIRS WE DETECT LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT IN REGARD TO CSCE, UNGA ISSUES, EAST-WEST RELATONS PARTICULARLY. THE PROFESSIONALS IN IVEAGH HOUSE SEEM TO BE RUNNING THE SHOW, AND FOREIGN MINISTER O'KENNEDY HAS YET HAD LITTLE IMPACT. MOST OF HIS SPEECHES, AND THOSE OF PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
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DAVID ANDREWS, ARE WRITTEN BY THE PROFESSIONALS. THIS IS QUITE A CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD. BUT IT IS TOO SOON TO JUDGE O'KENNEDY. HE ADHERES CLOSELY TO LYNCH'S CAUTIOUS APPROACH. IF THERE IS ANY DISCERNIBLE TREND IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, IT IS A SLIGHT, VERY SLIGHT, TURNING TO THE RIGHT. IRELAND'S TENDENCY TO SIDE WITH THE DUTCH, I.E., TO TAKE THE MOST LIBERAL VIEW, WITHIN EC DELIBERATIONS WHICH WAS BECOMING MORE MARKED UNDER FITZGERALD APPEARS TO HAVE LESSENED. WHETHER THIS WILL PRESAGE MORE OF A TENDENCY TO SIDE WITH THE FRENCH AS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF IRISH MEMBERSHIP, REMAINS TO BE SEEN. U.S.-IRELAND BILATERAL TIES APPEAR TO BE EVEN CLOSER THAN EVER. RENDAHL

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